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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: FM DE GUCHT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

¶1. (SBU) Belgian FM De Gucht's trip through the Middle East took him to Lebanon and Israel. In Lebanon March 21, he met with Nabih Berri, President of the Lebanese Parliament. De Gucht reportedly was critical in his meeting with Berri, stressing the need for the Lebanese Parliament to come together quickly to form a government of national unity. He also criticized Syria's "refusal to be part of a solution" by refusing to assist in the investigation of the murder of former Prime Minister Hariri. De Gucht also visited Belgian troops in Tibnin, who are removing cluster bombs.

¶2. (SBU) In Israel, De Gucht spoke with Prime Minister Olmert, who reportedly said offering to have contact with non-Hamas ministers was an error that would embolden Hamas. De Gucht said the new government still needs to prove itself, and that it will be judged by its actions, which are worth more than declarations of its program, which each party can interpret based on what they want to hear. Actions that would indicate progress include freeing the Israeli soldier being held hostage in Gaza, stopping the firing of rockets into Israel, and working to eliminate terrorist groups in Palestine. Belgium has resolved not to have contact with elected Hamas officials, and has expressed reluctance to provide direct aid to the new Palestinian administration, saying the conditions for such aid are not yet met.

¶3. (U) De Gucht plans to finish his trip by meeting with his Israeli counterpart, then traveling to Ramallah on Friday to meet with Mahmoud Abbas and Zyad Abu Amr.

IMBRIE